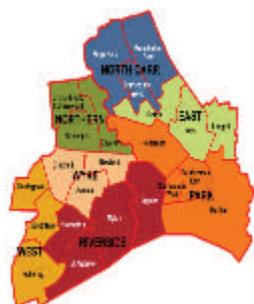
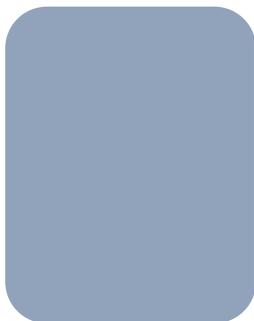


Setting up a Group: Writing your Group's Rules



Hull CVS
'community and voluntary services'



This factsheet gives you information on how to write your group's rules.

Introduction

When a group of people come together to do something as a group, there are no rules. Gradually you start to run into questions, though: If your members come from other groups, how do you avoid confusion between different groups? What if somebody new wants to join? If the group gets some money, who decides how to spend it?

How does the group make sure that everyone has the chance to say their piece? How can you prove to other bodies, like organisations that make grants, that you are a responsible, accountable bunch of people who will do what you've agreed to do, and spend money correctly?

This is called **governance**, and this is why you need a **constitution** or a set of **rules**. A constitution is a slightly more formal document. If your group is going to want to register as a Charity for instance, or apply for substantial sums of money, you will need a proper constitution.

But if your group is going to be small and informal, such as a self help group or a drop in club, a constitution might be more than you need. This handout is designed for your group to use to help agree your rules. If you need a hand, Hull CVS can help your group agree its rules.

helping you make a difference

What Rules are we talking about?

Groups might have all kinds of rules. For instance, self help groups will have rules about confidentiality, and support groups might have rules about behaviour during meetings while clubs might have rules about attendance. But when you deal with other organisations (especially ones that might give your group some money), these aren't the rules that they will need to know about. It's the rules about how you make your decisions and manage your group's affairs, especially the money, that will be wanted.

What Rules do we need to have?

There are certain things that you will need to agree in your group, and write down, to create your group's rules.

- **Name:** Very important, your group needs a name that clearly identifies it and makes it distinct from any other group. This name will be the name you also use for your group's bank account and any other correspondence. If your group doesn't have a clear name that you stick to, or uses different names in different places, it will lead to a lot of confusion.
- **Purpose:** Why does your group exist? What brought you together? Sometimes called Aims or Objects, your purpose is crucial to include in your rules. It helps to make clear to outsiders what your group exists to do, and helps to keep your group on track so that you don't drift and start doing things you were not set up to do. If you want your group to be Charitable (even if it will always be small and will never register as a Charity) you will need some guidance on writing down your purpose.
- **Powers:** You need to think about all the things your group will need to do to achieve its purpose, like apply for money; lease premises; collaborate with other groups. What *can't* your group do? For instance, if your group is only small, employing staff is likely to be something you will *not* include in this section. If your group grows, and is likely to want to do these things, you may find your rules are no longer enough and you will have to adopt a more formal constitution.
- **Management of the group:** The easy way is to have a committee, in which case you need to say how you will choose your committee members, and you will need to include the rules about how the committee works. Or you might have other ways of making the important decisions, in which case it will help if you think through who can make important decisions. Especially important will be your rules about managing your money, like having a special club or society bank account in the group's name.
- **Holding Meetings:** Your group might meet every week for members to support each other or socialise. But when does your group make its important decisions? What if you agree in your group one day to spend a large amount of money on something, and the next time you meet some of your members, who weren't there, complain they didn't know about it? How many members (or committee members if you have them) have to be there to make a decision? What sort of decisions does this rule apply to? You hardly need to get all your members to discuss and vote on sending out for more teabags, but you might do to decide whether or not to apply for a grant to buy a computer.



- **Membership:** Who can join your group? Can people be part of your group in other ways, like associate or junior members? Sometimes for instance self help groups might want to make sure the group is controlled by people who share the same difficulty or problem, but allow other people (like carers or professionals) to be associate members so that they can support the group without being able to control it.
- **Payments or benefits:** You need a rule that says your committee members will not be paid by the group. (They can be reimbursed for their expenses, but you will need to make it clear they don't get any other payments from the group.)
- **Changing the rules:** Every group changes and develops. There is likely to come the day when your group finds its rules are not very helpful any more, or one particular rule is not working. So how do you go about changing them? You can't just have one person changing them without asking everyone else. Would you need to hold a special meeting? Would you need to let all your members know in advance about the proposed changes? How many of your members would have to be there to be able to agree to make the change?
- **Closing down the group:** If the group ends, what will you do with its property? How will you actually make the decision to end the group? Usually the rule would be something along the lines of holding a meeting with all the members and agreeing to close the group. The rule will also say that this meeting is where your members will agree on a group or charity with a similar purpose to which you will donate any money or property left over (after you've paid off any debts or returned any unspent grants). It is

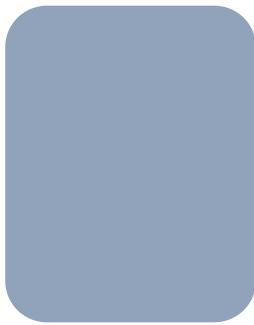
also a good idea not to name any particular group or charity in your rules, as the people who are there in years to come might not agree, or the group you name might no longer exist.

Adopting the rules

Generally, you need to write down what you think will be your group's rules and take them to your members. Your members will agree to them, either informally or by voting.

It is a good idea to get the people at that meeting to sign the copy of the rules that you've adopted, and write the date on. And you will need to do the same if you ever change your rules.

That way, you avoid the situation where different people in the group have different versions of the rules and you don't know which is correct. You then need to keep your rules somewhere safe, and make photocopies if you ever need to send your rules to anyone, like a grant-giving organisation.



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